

Dear President Obama:

If reports are accurate, it is our understanding that you sent a letter to Russian President Medvedev last month suggesting your Administration would halt the development of a European missile defense system in exchange for Russian assistance to stop Iran from developing nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles. We are concerned that the Administration may be undertaking a surprisingly unilateral action. Though we share your strong devotion to our national security and the security of our allies, we believe it is unwise and premature to offer such a concession. We urge you to clarify your Administration's position and respectfully caution against a policy that relies too heavily on Russian cooperation.

Reports of the letter are disconcerting for a number of reasons. Foremost, the policy does not adequately recognize the threat posed by Iran. Moreover, it rests on a questionable assumption that Russia can effectively curb Iran's nuclear ambitions and weakens our position in future bilateral negotiations. Lastly, it undermines NATO's endorsement of the European missile defense proposal. In particular, it undercuts our allies—the Czech Republic and Poland—who received bipartisan assurances that once they approved the missile defense agreements, the U.S. would provide support and funding.

Russia's actions, particularly in Eastern Europe, give us little confidence that they can be relied upon to follow through with such a commitment. Over the last year, as you know, Russia has pursued a divisive policy to re-exert its Soviet-era sphere of influence. During this time, Russia invaded Georgia, intimidated other nations from joining NATO, and threatened to target Eastern Europe with nuclear missiles should the proposed European missile defense sites be built. Further, amidst a global economic crisis, Russia has disrupted shipments of natural gas to Europe for the second time in three years. Most recently, Russia used financial incentives to persuade Kyrgyzstan to deny the U.S. access to its Manas military base in order to support coalition operations in Afghanistan. Given these events, we seriously question reliance upon Russia's support for a common approach on Iran or missile defense.

Iran has clearly indicated they have no intention of halting their nuclear or ballistic missile programs, and their recent actions substantiate this point. Last month, they launched a satellite into orbit using dual-use, long-range ballistic missile technology. Last weekend, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that Iran has enough enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon. Two weeks ago, the International Atomic Energy Agency found that Iran underestimated by a third how much uranium it has enriched and noted that Iran has a total of 5,600 centrifuges—an increase from the 3,800 listed in a November 2008 report—despite three rounds of United Nations Security Council sanctions.

Despite these developments, Russian leaders have indicated a fundamental disagreement with the West's views on the threat posed by Iran. Simply put, they apparently do not see a threat. Furthermore, Moscow continues to benefit economically from its support of Iran's nuclear program, specifically through the Bushehr nuclear reactor it has helped Iran build. For all these reasons, we remain skeptical that Russia would be in a position to halt Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile ambitions, and cautious of a strategy that relies on that nation's action vis-à-vis Iran to protect us and our allies.

Furthermore, we anticipate bilateral arms control negotiations with Russia this year and are concerned that any concessions promised in this regard may prejudice favorable outcomes. As Robert Kagan recently noted, "If Russian leaders believe that the United States is looking for a way out... they will negotiate accordingly. They might ask why they should make a deal at all." If Russia perceives it can gain U.S. concessions on missile defense now, will it be more likely to demand greater concessions later in negotiations on arms control, nonproliferation, and counter-terrorism?

Lastly, as you know, the European missile defense proposal is a NATO policy. During last year's Bucharest Summit, its leaders endorsed the proposal to place 10 interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic, citing its "substantial contribution to the protection of Allies." According to the studies we've seen, this proposal is cost-effective and the technology, which is largely based on systems fielded today in Alaska and California, works. Should the United States jettison this proposal, we risk losing our credibility both in the alliance and as a global leader in building collective security. In today's complex geopolitical environment, our relationship with our allies and friends is paramount to addressing our mutual security concerns. What message does it send to our allies—specifically the Czech Republic and Poland—that the United States may not carry out its security commitments?

We strongly support the goal of preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and believe it is in Russia's interests to work with the international community to achieve this goal. However, we do not believe that terminating the European missile defense proposal in exchange for Russian assistance with Iran is the best course of action to meet our national security objectives.

Mr. President, in the future, we hope you will choose consultation with the Congress and our allies instead of unilateral action when crafting such important policy proposals. There is bipartisan support in Congress for European missile defense and we look forward to the clarification of your position on this vital issue. As you discuss our collective security challenges with the international

community, we encourage you to send a clear, transparent, and consistent message to our allies that we will honor our collective security commitments.